

Islands in the Salish Sea Community Mapping Project: Portrait of a Renowned Community in Transition

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Abstract

Accompanied by a slide presentation of more than 30 artistic community maps, we will describe this innovative regional community mapping project. The Islands in the Salish Sea Community Mapping Project has brought over 17 island communities together to gather, collect and present local and scientific knowledge in the form of artistic community maps. This collaboration has increased the capacity of these island communities, in terms of mapping skills and the power these maps have, especially in order to influence decision-makers and to cross boundaries between community values, art and science.

- The project has initiated new 2000 state of the island inventories from 17 island communities.
- The mapping process, involving community workshops, public events, interviews and information-sharing sessions, has increased local and regional knowledge of island culture, economies, energy & transportation needs, habitats and species in the Strait of Georgia.
- The exhibition of the collection of over 30 maps has toured all the islands, and has developed a significant increase in awareness of common ecological and cultural issues among island residents and a new sense of regional identification.
- Four regional maps form part of the collection; at least two of which will be complete by the date of the Forum: terrestrial & threatened species, energy and transportation, marine, and economics.

The session will be valuable to planners and policy-makers working for sustainable development in the islands within the Georgia Basin region. The session will also be of particular interest to scientists wishing to include more community knowledge in their research, and for those wishing to develop more innovative and inclusive ways of presenting their research results.

Mapping as a cartographic tradition is ancient. Mapping as an art form is new. Artistic Community Mapping is a new genre that reveals the collaboration between science, art and the community. These maps preserve significant natural and cultural heritage. It's almost as though it's not the final product—the map—that saves the place, it's the collaboration, the actual process of linking together. The final art is a visual statement of the collaboration.

Overall Project Description

The Islands in the Salish Sea Community Mapping project has brought together local communities on all 17 of the populated islands in the Salish Sea (Georgia Strait) to research, record and communicate their communities' distinct natural, economic and cultural heritage. In **Phase I**, local coordinators on each island held numerous public events, workshops, meetings, and interviews bringing together a community portrait of what is of value to these islanders, including economic, social and natural heritage features. Artists were brought into the process as early as possible, and contracted to illustrate this community knowledge and values through *Artistic Community Maps*. **Phase II** of the project is a traveling exhibition of these maps, which is now making its way around the islands, to acclaim and astonishment at all stops. **Phase III** will bring together the 32 final maps plus a full description of this historic three-year community collaborative process, additional materials gathered during this historic recording of these vulnerable and beautiful island communities, into the *Atlas of the Islands in the Salish Sea*.

Rationale or Summary of Need for the Resource

The Islands in the Salish Sea (Georgia Strait) are widely recognized as a region of national and international ecological and cultural significance. They are protected by a special Act of the British Columbia government, and are administered

as a Trust Area for all the people of Canada. The Islands have held on to their rural identities for the past 100 years, but they are now under increasing development pressure as more people arrive seeking a different way of life than can be found in cities or suburbia. At the same time, thousands of people from across the country and around the world visit the area each year in search of recreational experiences and contact with these distinctive natural and cultural communities. Although some people live and work on these islands, many have come here to retire. There are increasing inequities between the working and retirement communities, and development stresses, both residential and commercial, in addition to increasing use by industrial and private logging companies. These very qualities, which draw people from all over the world, result in development pressures that are threatening to undermine the natural and cultural diversity upon which the islands depend for their long-term survival.

Recent changes to federal government policy have enabled marine protected areas to come into effect in the area (including one national marine park). These recent social, development and conservation initiatives are on the brink of creating a substantial change to the traditional way of life for these islanders. Much of the area's economic backbone is based on the natural values of the area; thus these communities are now at a critical point in their development where they need to take stock of who, what and where they are in order to facilitate a sustainable future on these sensitive and isolated communities. The project is hoping to help ensure the long term survival and well-being of these unique British Columbia communities, cherished the world over as ecological gems on the edge of coastal Canada.

"This project will help preserve and protect the islands' culture, heritage and ecosystems and will create a resource for future rural planning and community economic development initiatives."

~ Jan Pullinger, Minister of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers.

"This project promises to produce a unique legacy for future generations."

~Robert Bateman, internationally renowned local artist and naturalist living on the island and involved in the project.

The objectives of this three-year long historic community project are to gather existing knowledge from the local communities about the "state of the islands" and communicate that knowledge through *Artistic Community Maps*. As one artist explains: "Mapping subverts established notions of what art is or can be, as it brings image and science together to create community knowledge" (Caffyn Kelley, Saltspring Artist pers comm). Island Artists portray this community-driven, inclusive project through the presentation of 32 full colour maps. In phases I and II the coordination of the mapping process and the contracting of the final maps has occurred. The maps themselves have not been purchased, but only the rights to display them at the exhibitions, and reproduce them in the *Atlas of the Salish Sea*. The original works belong to the artists, and these pieces will be returned to the artists and their island homes in July 2003.

Within the first two years, the project has brought together local communities on all 17 of the populated islands in the Salish Sea to research, record and communicate their islands' distinct natural, economic and cultural heritage. In Phase I, the three primary project coordinators, Judi Stevenson, Sheila Harrington and Briony Penn gathered associations and coordinators from each of the 17 islands together to plan this historic community collaboration. We held several overall coordinators' workshops, and then local coordinators on each island held numerous public events, workshops, meetings, and interviews bringing together a community inventory of their island. Artists were brought into the process as early as possible and contracted to illustrate this community knowledge and values through an *Artistic Community Map*. In addition, a series of five regional maps were contracted through a Request For Proposal process to complete the portrait. These include: Marine life in the Salish Sea; Energy & Transportation Systems of the Salish Sea; Economic Portrait of the Salish Sea Islanders; Threatened Ecosystems of the Salish Sea; and Protected Areas within the Islands Trust.

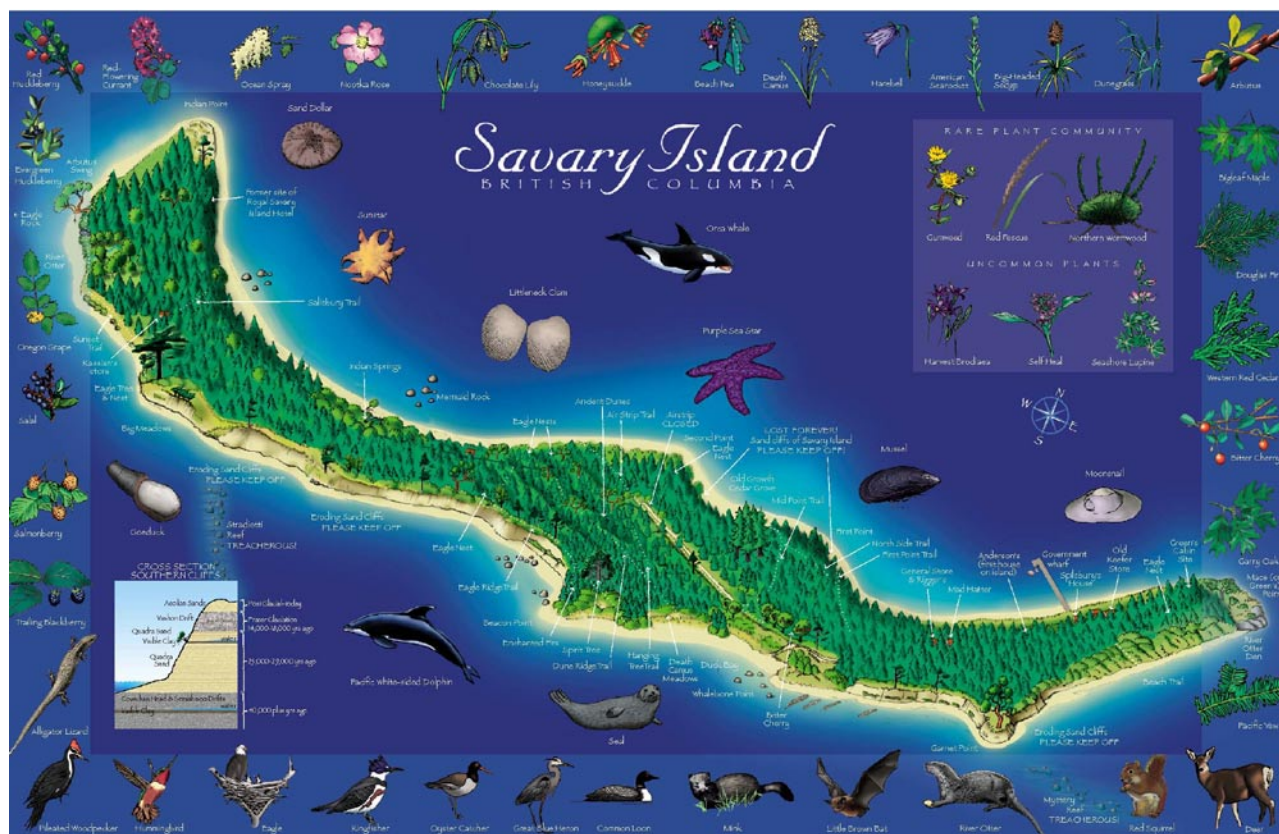
Phase 2 of the project is a traveling exhibition of these maps, which is now making its way around the islands, to acclaim and astonishment at all stops. We have held these exhibitions at 14 of the 17 islands, in downtown Vancouver, Sidney, and our final two exhibitions scheduled for May 12-19 on Saltspring Island, and July 2-7th at the national conference in Victoria: The Leading Edge, Stewardship & Conservation in Canada. We have a guest book from these exhibitions so far containing more than 125 pages (approx. 8-12 comments per page) of positive and encouraging remarks from viewers expressing how important these maps are for future community planning use, and as an important development in the Community Collaboration and Cartographic fields (some comments attached). At the most recent exhibition at the national Energy Board's Hearings on a proposed gas pipeline from Washington past these islands to Vancouver Island, the judges were able to view the natural characteristics and values held by these communities, as they looked at these artistic, powerful maps in the hallway outside the hearings. (Without the Atlas, this opportunity to affect planning will never occur again.) The maps are all returning to their home islands, following the exhibition July 7, in Victoria.

Production of *The Atlas of the Islands in Salish Sea* is the final and most important stage. Without this comprehensive collection of the maps, displaying what is important and of value to these communities, together with the stories of the mapping process, future advocacy for conservation and community planning will revert back to the top-down government approach, which leaves these communities isolated and without any way of regionally presenting the economic, natural and cultural or social values that must be protected to ensure some sustainability on these vulnerable, and rapidly developing island communities .

The collection of these beautifully rendered and significant Artistic Community Maps will be displayed in the centre of the book. Introductory sections will outline the power and nature of bioregional and artistic community mapping and the nature of the change in the islands' way of life since the last millennium. The maps will be featured with accompanying pages including legends, additional graphics, and the story of the maps. Following will be chapters describing the community process that these islands went through to arrive at these artistic portraits of the islands, and descriptions of the artistic demands, techniques and tools that can be followed in other communities. Final chapters will explore sustainability concerns and issues for the islands' as a region, for similar communities, and for the many people who call them home.

The project and Atlas is designed to offer both an example for other communities in transition and as a remarkable portrait of the necessary information, methods and processes that can support sustainability in this specific region of Canada. We believe that the book will become a powerful resource for these communities over time, and for other communities, such as its sold out and revised predecessor – *Giving The Land a Voice, Mapping Our Home Places*.

Samples of maps on following pages...



Map #1. Savary Island, Coordinator, Liz Webster, Artists: Kathy Kabarle, Tony Wypkema



Map #2. Quadra Island, Coordinator, Ian Douglas, Artist Leanne Hodges



Map #3. Saltspring Island, Coordinator, Caffyn Kelly, Artist Margaret Threlfall



Map #4. Texada Island, Coordinator, Lee Thorpe, Artist Amanda Martinson